

PEOPLE & THINGS By ATTICUS

ONE of the difficulties of a banquet such as was given at the Dorchester last week by the English-Speaking Union is that the speeches, though varying in quality, are inclined to be on one note. And when there are no fewer than six speeches the ear and the mind would find it almost a relief if someone put the opposite case.

The Duke of Edinburgh could not make a poor speech if he tried but even his wit was muted as if he felt that nothing should be said that might disturb the process of post-Suez reconciliation with our transatlantic cousins. Nevertheless, the Duke is a master of the art of being serious without being dull, and can summon laughter from his hearers without descending to that awful cliché of top-table oratory: "The presence of his Excellency reminds me of the story..."

Lord Ismay, who has just retired from the post of Secretary-General of N.A.T.O., had a lot to say. There is no man who has done more to make N.A.T.O. a working partnership. With a combination of modesty and gallantry he told us that he could not have carried out his heavy task without the help of his wife. This drew a loud burst of applause, yet I found myself wondering... Lady Ismay is indeed a woman of high intelligence and character, but would her husband alone have been a helpless giant?

Derby Victor

SIR VICTOR SASSOON may have thrown his hat into the air as his horse passed the winning-post at the Derby, but somehow I doubt it. He is one of those men who fly into a deep calm at moments of crisis. The Japanese generals found that out when they invaded Shanghai and threatened to take Sir Victor's business undertakings from him unless he paid a very large sum of money. "You will really take them of my hands?" asked Sir

Victor. "How splendid! I have been trying to get rid of them for years." At the end of the discussions, which had got nowhere, the generals asked Sir Victor why he was so anti-Japanese. "I am not anti-Japanese," he answered. "I am pro-British and very pro-Sassoon."

Sir Victor has a house in Nassau with a bar which would be a credit to any village pub. There he mixes cocktails for his guests and breaks down the formality which so often numbs the period before dinner.

Romeo Debunked

ACCORDING to a travel book-let Signor Solimani, the custodian of Romeo's tomb in old Verona, has grave doubts not only of Shakespeare, but of Romeo himself.

"Shakespeare has it all wrong," states Signor Solimani. "Romeo was not what Shakespeare made him. I doubt that he committed suicide in the crypt after he found Juliet sleeping. I think Romeo was killed in the moonlight duel with Paris." He adds darkly: "Romeo was a good-for-nothing drunkard and a swordsman. He was always quarrelling."

Is nothing sacred?

Canadians Abroad

WE still, in the home country, know too little of what goes on in the Commonwealth. We know still less, perhaps, of the contribution to our own everyday lives made by visitors, or settlers in reverse, from them; and I have been much struck by the facts amassed in a book called "I Found Canada Abroad" (Ryerson Press) which has just reached me from Toronto. Its author, Robert Moon, is a young journalist who recently spent a year over here under the Kemsley Empire Journalists Scheme. Part of his time he spent on what was evidently a rewarding quest—tracking down both the origins of great Canadians and the

activities of Canadians in Europe today.

From the High Commissioner's vast London office to the Monte Carlo villa of Robert Service, in offices, studios, embassies and service headquarters he followed a trail less arduous, no doubt, than that of his own country's English or French pioneers, but equally a matter for pride. In his next edition he will be able to include Canada's recent and remarkable output of tenors—Richard Verreau, both of whom distinguished themselves in "The Trojans" last Thursday.

Back from Moscow

IF Sir Malcolm Sargent had not taken to the baton he could have made a successful and even a brilliant journalist. We lunched together last Thursday on his return from Moscow. Though he had gone there to conduct a series of concerts he kept his eyes open for the Enigma Variations of the Russian scene.

His description of the Soviet was that of a nation cut off from the outside world yet with a healthy curiosity as to how other peoples are living. It is an historic fact that for nearly half a century there has been no freedom of movement for the Russian people and equally no freedom of entry into Russia by foreigners.

Music and of course the ballet play a big part in the life of the people. While Sir Malcolm was there a factory booked all the seats for its symphony concert, and its workers filled the hall. It is a sombre thought that the unfortunate Russians have to content themselves with the ballet and symphony concerts and art galleries instead of enjoying the refinement of commercial television.

Honour to Elgar

WHILE we are on the subject of musicians I must acknowledge the receipt of a number of disapproving letters concerning my comments last week on the failure to pay sufficient tribute to Sir Edward Elgar's centenary. These letters point out that in many places, including the Albert Hall, there were orchestral and choral concerts devoted to his works.

With great respect I suggest that was not enough. Sir Malcolm Sargent, who conducted the Elgar Concert at the Albert Hall, is entirely of my opinion that the Centenary Tribute should have been organised by the State. This was a task for Dr. Hill, whose Ministerial job is to beat the national drum.

With due deference I suggest that the Archbishop of Canterbury might well have delivered a memorial address at the Albert Hall concert, for Elgar had supplied the musical gloriana for every State occasion in the Abbey from Royal weddings to State funerals. Surely Sir Winston Churchill, too, although not a passionate lover of music, would gladly have paid public tribute to the man who gave to Britain its second National Anthem, "Land of Hope and Glory." Imagination was at a low ebb in dealing with this matter.

The P.M. and the T.U.C.

YOU may remember that last year Mr. Harold Macmillan, then Chancellor of the Exchequer, offered to address the

annual conference of the T.U.C. For some reason the newly elected president, Mr. Frank Cousins, announced this to the conference and then asked, the foolish question: "What does he think this is—a film festival?" It was all the more odd because Mr. Cousins is normally a man of dignity and restraint.

But now the trade-union Goliath is faced by a darling David. Mr. Harman Nicholls, who is a Junior Minister both in rank and in years, has made a public speech urging Mr. Cousins to think again this year. With unanswerable logic he says: "Trade-union members are supporters of all political parties and should have the opportunity of hearing and meeting the Prime Minister of the day whatever his party."

Mr. Cousins would be wise to seize this chance of undoing his blunder of last year.

Courage

THERE will be sad hearts when it becomes known tomorrow that Sir Ian Fraser is giving up his post as National President of the British Legion. For ten years he has led and guided the Legion with an energy that never flagged. I hope that this is not the beginning of a retreat from his other activities, including membership of the House of Commons.

Sir Ian was blinded while serving in France in the 1914-18 war but with a spirit that could not be crushed he determined to live and work and serve as though he were the same as other men. He has business interests in South Africa and flies out there each year to see that things are going right. As Chairman of the Executive Council of St. Dunstan's since 1921 he has helped hundreds to find a full life in the realm of darkness.

Almost every evening his wife comes to Westminster to drive him home when Parliament rises. To dine with the two of them at the House is to enjoy a gay party. The mutual consideration and the laughter when they are together are a joy—yet he has never seen her face. This is a man! And this is a woman!

Kill-joy Ernie

THE officials of the Premium Savings Bond office seem to be taking typical bureaucratic measures to repress any undue sense of joy or levity among those on whom Ernie has cast his favour. Sir Miles Thomas tells me that yesterday morning he received by post notification that his "Bond serial number quoted below which has been drawn this month for a prize of £25 (twenty-five pounds)."

The communication, in a depressingly buff window-dressy style marked "On the M. & S. Service," is far too reminiscent of income-tax communications to be spontaneously exhilarating. The wording on the enclosed printed slip is in doleful officialities, including—in peremptory italics—a glum little note about the death of the registered bond-holder, and firm requests for signed declarations that the bond has not been encashed and will be produced for inspection when payment of the prize money is made. The whole tenor of the missive is coldly out of keeping with any encouragement to buy some more Premium Bonds and have another flutter.

People and Words

"Bathing in milk to keep the skin clear and silky is not a habit to be followed by Members of Parliament. We have to be thick-skinned, not silk-skinned!"

—MR. HEATHCOTE-AMORY.

"You may have a nice little strike again tomorrow; it depends on what our members are feeling."

—MR. FRANK FOLKES.

President of the B.T.U.

"I love racing so much that although I am supposed to have been born with a silver spoon in my mouth it might easily have been a silver stop-watch!"

—MR. JOHN HAY WHITNEY.

"It is impossible to re-educate capitalists. Only the grave will cure the hunchback."

—MR. KIRCHENRECH.